



**Evidence That Jesus and The Original
Aramaic Christians Were Vegetarians -- The
Veg Passages Blog, By James Bean**

“As long as Man continues to be the ruthless destroyer of lower living beings, he will never know health or peace. For as long as men massacre animals, they will kill each other. Indeed, he who sows the seed of murder and pain cannot reap joy and love.” (Pythagoras)

“Nothing will benefit human health and increase chances for survival of life on Earth as much as the evolution to a vegetarian diet.” (Albert Einstein)

“Be on guard, so that your hearts do not become heavy with the eating of flesh and with the intoxication of wine and with the anxiety of the world, and that day come upon you suddenly; for as a snare it will come upon all who dwell upon the surface of the earth.” (Jesus, Luke 21:34, Evangelion Da-Mepharreshe—Old Syriac-Aramaic Manuscript of the New Testament Gospels)

“Go and find out what is meant by the scripture that says: ‘It is kindness that I want, not animal sacrifices.’” (Jesus, Gospel of Matthew 9:13, Good News translation)

The carnistic premise or bias of Western church tradition about eating meat is solely based upon European dietary customs without any awareness of the vegetarian ethics of the original Jesus movement and antecedents of the Hebrew Christians such as the Prophets, Essenes, Therapeutae, also the Nasoraean John the Baptist movement. As part of their apologetics some press into service a few often-repeated verses in order to reinforce their already established preference for eating meat.

It is said, "That which enters into the mouth doesn't defile the man; but that which proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man." That's Matthew 15:11, which is often used by some as a thought-canceling verse to shut down the conversation about vegetarianism and Christianity. But if we closely examine the earliest sections of the New Testament, the honest observer will notice that for many in early Christianity vegetarian ethics *did matter greatly*, that the apostle *Paul was having some serious disputes with others in the early church over diet, and about eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols in pagan temples.*

And we will discover a Jesus movement that was not only adhering to a vegetarian diet as part of its ethical code referred to as "the Yoke of the Lord" (in the Didache, the Lord's Teaching Through the Twelve Apostles to the Nations), they were also opposed to ritual animal sacrifice in the temple of Jerusalem.

How can this be, if diet didn't matter, we encounter voices even within what can be thought of as mainstream Christianity saying things like this? "The consumption of animal flesh was unknown up until the great flood. But since the great flood, we have had animal flesh stuffed into our mouths. Jesus, the Christ, who appeared when the time was fulfilled, again joined the end to the beginning, so that we are now no longer allowed to eat animal flesh." (Saint Jerome, translator of the Latin Vulgate Bible)

Below you will find vegetarian sayings of Jesus from many sources—canonical and extra-canonical—along with a collection of passages revealing that the Apostles of the Jesus

Movement were also vegetarians, following in the footsteps of their spiritual Master. In addition, I include examples of pro-veg passages from some early church fathers and many other writings too.

This article is intended to serve as a major resource on the web for many seeking greater access to the vegetarian passages from early Christianity and related spiritual movements of antiquity, along with references from various scholars exploring the evidence for a vegetarian Jesus at the beginning of Christianity!

For those not acquainted with Judeo-Christian history and the various collections of writings or scriptures from the early centuries A.D., at first glance, or at least on the surface, it appears that Jesus ate fish and John the Baptist dined on insects. Certainly European oriented Christianity enjoys portraying it that way. The uninformed Sunday school notion of the disciples of Jesus forever remaining fisherman lives on in the minds of many.

When it comes to vegetarianism and Christianity the first question people always ask is: “In the scriptures aren’t there passages describing Jesus as serving fish on a couple of occasions, as well as eating lamb during the Jewish holiday known as Passover?” They have inherited the belief that Jesus was a meat-eating-Messiah. Some might also cite a verse about John the Baptist eating insects (locusts).

Dueling Gospel Traditions—Pro-Meat and Pro-Veg

There are two traditions within Buddhism: pro-meat and pro-vegetarian. Each have their own sutras or scriptures serving as proof-texts.

The same is historically true with Christianity: the original Jesus Movement or Hebrew Christians (sometimes called Aramaic Christians, Ebionites or Nasoraeans) with their gospels vs. scriptures associated with Paul and what evolved into the Roman church.

The Gospels of the Hebrews and Ebionites describe a vegetarian ethos: a vegetarian Jesus and vegetarian Apostles, a John the Baptist who ate carob (locust beans)—beans not bugs! and a rejection of ritual animal sacrifice, be it in pagan temples or the Jewish temple of Jerusalem.

For the followers of Paul, dropping the vegetarian dietary requirement of the Jesus Movement was a way to make it easier to get more converts around the Roman Empire.

In Sikhism as well we see a similar kind of shift away from the earlier vegetarian ethics of the founder, Guru Nanak, towards meat-eating gradually getting adopted by orthodox Sikhism.

In each of these cases the original spiritual movements were vegetarian, but later versions of these paths eventually accommodated the diet of the larger cultures around them swelling their ranks.

For most, living their busy lives and not interested in difficult research, this is an all-too-complicated history of Passover lambs eaten or not eaten, locusts vs. locust beans, and other

“fishy” choices made by certain gospel manuscript copyists adding extra servings of fish to the menu. Most stay stuck with whatever diet and beliefs they’ve grown up with. Change (metanoia) is not their way. So on the question of diet they just

see what they wish to see

and change shall never be.

Those on a spiritual quest seeking truth are sometimes more flexible and willing to change. ***Only a compassionate heart will figure this out.***

What About Those Pesky ‘Fishes and Loaves’?

The original version of the “Feeding of the Multitude” story only refers to bread, not bread with fish. “Fish” apparently got added to some gospel verses later on. Keith Akers points out the existence of different versions of the biblical story—the Feeding of the 5,000 or the Multitude:

“If you look at other accounts of the same incident... If you look, for example, at the Early Church Fathers, who also talk about these stories, Irenaeus mentions the feeding of the 5,000. Eusebius also mentions that, and Arnobius, another early church writer also discusses Jesus’ feeding of the multitude, the miraculous feeding of the multitude.

“And in every case they discuss the bread but they don’t mention anything about fish. So I think that fish is a later addition.” In fact, if you even look at the New Testament, it

says, at another point, when Jesus is talking about the feeding of the five thousand, he says, ‘Don’t you remember when I fed the multitudes and all the bread that we took up?’ ***And he doesn’t mention the fish.***” (Keith Akers, see, Fish Stories in the New

Testament: <https://compassionatespirit.com/wpblog/2012/01/31/the-fish-stories-in-the-new-testament>)

Also see: The Lost Religion of Jesus: Simple Living and Nonviolence in Early Christianity, pages 126-129), on fish as a later addition:

<https://archive.org/details/lostreligionofje0000aker/page/126/mode/2up?q=fish>

And see: Keith Akers, Was Jesus a Vegetarian? <https://www.compassionatespirit.com/wpblog/2015/12/01/was-jesus-a-vegetarian>)

Matthew 16:9’s Loaves Without Any Mention of Fish: “Do you not yet perceive? Do you not remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many baskets you gathered?” No fish included with the loaves there.

Mark 8:16–21—Again... another example of bread but no fish being mentioned in connection with the Feeding of the Five Thousand.

Irenaeus (125-202) lived during the Second Century and described in detail the Miracle of the Multitude being fed with bread. ***No mention whatsoever of fish. Eusebius and Arnobius also never mention ‘fishes with the loaves’, only the loaves.*** And now I’ve found two more references in early

Christian apocryphal writings, again mentioning the bread but not the fish, as if in the New Testament they were reading at the time, the feeding of the five thousand story didn't include fish... because the ***'fish' hadn't been inserted into Greek gospel manuscripts yet.***

As it now stands, in the New Testament Gospels: "The bread is everywhere present, but the fish only sometimes. This strongly suggests that the original tradition was about distribution of bread, not bread and fish. In the case of Matthew 16:9–10, the insertion of fish becomes obvious, because the editors of Matthew changed the original story to include fish but forgot to change Jesus' backward reference."
(Keith Akers, The Fish Stories in the New Testament: <https://www.compassionatespirit.com/wpblog/2012/01/31/the-fish-stories-in-the-new-testament>)

There are actually many examples of "textual variations" in the diversity of New Testament manuscripts, with words or phrases either being added or omitted. In New Testament manuscripts, while there are some textual variations throughout, by far, the majority of variations occur with the Four Gospels and the Book of Acts.

See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_major_textual_variants_in_the_New_Testament

And

see: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Textual_variants_in_the_New_Testament

The most spectacular example of this is at the end of the Gospel of Mark, which has several different alternate endings depending on what manuscript one happens to be using:

- “Manuscripts omitting Mark 16:9–20
- Manuscripts adding a shorter ending after verse 8
- Manuscripts adding a shorter ending and verses 9–20
- Manuscripts adding verses 9–20
- Manuscripts adding verses 9–20 with a notation
- Manuscripts adding verses 9–20 without divisions”

See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mark_16#Scholarly_conclusions

So it's interesting to notice that fishes are not always included with the loaves in the various accounts of the “Feeding of the Five Thousand” mentioned in the New Testament gospels and other sources.

And friends, far more than just this one example of fishes being added to the loaves in Second Century manuscripts, textual variants with New Testament manuscripts extend to scores and scores of passages deep into the Second Century and beyond according to honest scholarship, and I can only agree with their research.

The Gospel of John Chapter 21, Another Late Addition

"John 21 is the twenty-first and final chapter of the Gospel of John in the New Testament of the Christian Bible. It contains an account of a post-crucifixion appearance in Galilee, which the text describes as the third time Jesus had appeared to his

disciples. In the course of this chapter, there is a miraculous catch of 153 fish, the confirmation of Peter's love for Jesus, a foretelling of Peter's death, and a comment about the beloved disciple's future... According to Helmut Koester (2000), similar to the Pericope Adulterae, John 21:1–25, though present in all extant manuscripts, is also widely recognized as a later addition. A redactor is thought by some to have later added some text to the original author's work." (Wikipedia entry for John 21: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_21)

And see, Fish Stories About Pythagoras and Jesus, by Keith Akers, also discussing John 21: <https://compassionatespirit.com/wpblog/2022/04/04/fish-stories-about-pythagoras>

An Important Observation About the Fish Symbol

“...We should maybe keep in mind that fish was a well known mystical symbol... The Greek word for fish (Ichthys) was used as an acronym whose initials in Greek stood for ‘Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior’.” (Ted Altar, Did Christ at Least Eat Fish? https://ivu.org/history/christian/christ_veg.html)

In any case, “It’s not where you’ve been; it’s where you’re going,” as the saying goes. Many of us have changed our diets upon adopting a spiritual path or converting to a new religion. While several of the disciples are described as having once been fisherman, and there are clearly a few references to fish in the New Testament gospels composed for gentile readers, we find Jesus saying to his new friends: “**Come, follow Me and I will make you fishers of men [fishers of people, souls,].**” (Matthew 4:19, Mark 1:17) So rather than

remaining fisherman, perhaps operating some Sunday school imagined Jesus Fish Company of Galilee—some sort of lifelong career as fisherman, in other words—RATHER THAN THAT—what we do find is those individuals adopting a new spiritual path, being transformed into disciples and eventually even becoming spiritual teachers.

Scroll down to see the section below titled: The Vegetarian Apostles (Leadership of the Original Jesus Movement).

The original disciples of Jesus may have disappeared from view in the pages of the New Testament but their journeys continued and the libraries of early Christian texts offer much more information about the life and teachings of the various Apostles of Christ. Rather than fish metaphors, a variety of different sources in early Christianity described these Apostles as being vegetarians, as they got older, becoming the founders of various spiritual communities as the successors of Christ, focused on the teachings of Jesus.

“James, the brother of the Lord, lived on seeds and plants and touched neither meat nor wine.” The Apostle Thomas: “He continually fasts and prays, and abstaining from the eating of flesh...” “...The Apostle Matthew partook of seeds, and nuts, hard-shelled fruits, and vegetables, without flesh.” (these apostolic veg passages with attribution of sources is to be found further below in the section titled, The Vegetarian Apostles, Leadership of the Original Jesus Movement)

Peter: "Then Peter answered: 'To do anything for pleasure, not for the sake of necessity, is to sin and therefore I earnestly entreat you to abstain from all animal food, in the hope that by this you may be able to retain your self-restraint, and not to be overpowered by the allurements of pleasure. For in the beginning, the eating of flesh was unknown until after the flood, when, against their will, men were compelled to use the flesh of animals, because all things that were planted had been destroyed by the waters... But let no one think that by abstinence from things offered to idols he will fulfill the law. For what commands us to keep ourselves from idolatry also teaches us that we should eat only of the fruits of trees and seeds and plants, and abstain from all animal food, and from all injury of animals; and with regard to our food, that it should be purely vegetable.'" (Why God Has Forbidden Certain Foods, Book of the Clementine Homilies)

**Peter said, "I live on olives and bread, to which I rarely only add vegetables..." "The unnatural eating of flesh meats is as polluting as the heathen worship of devils..."
(Peter, Clementine Homilies)**

We even get to directly hear from several of those Apostles in various early Christian writings: gospels, acts, revelations, spiritual discourses, homilies, and letters of Peter, James, John, Thomas, Bartholomew, Barnabas, The Teaching of the Twelve, etc... See the online e-library, Early Christian

Writings: <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com>

In the Ebionite scriptures of the early church, the followers of Jesus, "the faith once delivered to the saints", as it is said in the Book of Jude, there are no fish stories of young disciples of Jesus being involved in eating fish. In the Ebionite scriptures of the Jesus movement there are no accounts of Jesus eating fish or miracles of multitudes being fed fish. There are no descriptions of Jesus consuming the flesh of any animal. Rather, those contain sayings of Jesus condemning the eating of meat. (See: The Ebionites: <https://www.compassionatespirit.com/wpblog/category/religion/ebionites>)

According to the Gospel of the Ebionites, Jesus rejected the Passover meal: "I have no desire to eat the flesh of this Paschal Lamb with you."

Furthermore, in the Ebionite scriptures Jesus condemned animal sacrifice in the temple of Jerusalem and sought to forever bring that practice to an end. The Ebionite or Hebrew Gospel quotes Jesus as saying, "I have come to abolish the sacrifices, and if you cease not from sacrificing, my wrath will not cease from you." (Panarion 30.16.5)

Below see the sections titled, Jesus Stopping Animal Sacrifice in the Temple, The Biblical Basis For Vegetarianism, and, Uncovering a Vegetarian Jesus (Yeshua) at the Beginning of Christianity.

See, The Acts and Teachings of the Ebionites: The Recognitions of Clement: <https://compassionatespirit.com/Books/Recognitions/Recognitions-TOC.htm>

**See, The Acts and Teachings of the Ebionites: The
Clementine Homilies:**

<https://compassionatespirit.com/Books/Homilies/Homilies-TOC.htm>

**Followers of John the Baptist: The
Mandaean Gnostic Tradition**

The Mandaeans are a living religion with ancient gnostic roots. They are a surviving branch of the old Nasoraean movement once existing in the Trans-Jordan region associated with John the Baptist and closely related to the early days of the Jesus movement. John the Baptist is considered by the Mandaeans to be their great prophet. In the Mandaean scriptures are preserved accounts of the life and teachings of John the Baptist including a book of the Sayings of Yuhana (John).

"Within Mandaicism, John is venerated as the greatest prophet and is regarded as a renewer and reformer of the ancient Mandaean faith... John is mentioned by the Roman Jewish historian Josephus and some scholars have proposed that he may have been associated with the Essenes, a semi-ascetic Jewish sect known for practicing ritual baptism. Most scholars agree that John baptized Jesus, and several New Testament accounts indicate that some of Jesus' earliest followers had previously been disciples of John. Many historians also suggest that Jesus himself may have been a disciple of John."
(Mandaepedia entry for John the Baptizer)

John the Baptist was a prophet with large number of followers in Israel and Transjordan regions. After his passing, several of his successors headed what became various rival Nasoraean (Nazorean) sects, one of those being Jesus and the Jesus movement. "Again Jesus said to his disciples: Truly I say to you, among all those born of women none has arisen greater than John the Baptizer." (Matthew 11:11, George Howard's translation of Shem-Tov's Hebrew Gospel of Matthew, a version of canonical Matthew described as "the oldest extant Hebrew version of the Gospel of Matthew")

"Do not eat animals. Don't eat a dead one, not a standing one, not a falling one, not a pregnant one, not one that has ambushed a wild animal." (Ginza Rabba -- The Great Treasure - Mandaean Scriptures, Mark Lidzbarski and Ram Al Sabiry)

"Before Him [the King of Light, Supreme Being] they do not offer a sacrifice, do not eat meat, do not drink wine of pleasure and do not sing before him a song of Sacrilege." (Ginza Rabba -- The Great Treasure, Mark Lidzbarski and Ram Al Sabiry)

"And they do not slaughter (sacrifice) before Him, nor do they eat any flesh-meat." (same passage from another translation of the Ginza Rabba)

Ethel Stefana Drower, the great Mandaean scholar of the 20th Century noticed vegetarian passages like the ones above in the Mandaean scriptures she was translating and asked some Mandaean priests about them.

In her book, *The Secret Adam*, E.S. Drower writes:

"Amongst Mandaean there is an oral tradition that some of them were once vegetarians."

"...Several pious Mandaean have told me that a deeply religious man forswears meat and fish. It will be seen in the legends that the Nasorai are represented as vegetarians..."

"The Essenes, together with other Jewish sects, seem ... to have imbibed, possibly from Iranian-Indian sources, the idea that slaughter was a crime, and that sacrifice of animals was unpleasing to the powers of light and life. The Essenes were vegetarians. It is possible that early Christianity derived its symbolism of a substituted victim, and the symbolism of bread for the flesh of the victim and wine for its blood, from this school of Jewish-Iranian thought."

"Josephus mentions that the Essenes were vegetarians, and Porphyry, quoting Eusebius, says that the Magians were divided into three classes, those who abstained from eating any living creature, those who abstained from domestic animals, and those who would not touch any and every animal."

Was John the Baptist Really A Bug-Eater?

Another example of translators deliberately trying to add meat to the menu (the canon of scripture) is the strange case of John the Baptist and his alleged diet of locusts. From wiki answers:

“There has been a long-standing confusion in the etymological origin of the word locust. Locust is both a bean from the carob plant and an insect. The Greek word for cakes or bread made from the flour of the carob bean is ‘egkrides’ and the Greek word for locust the insect is ‘akrides’.

There's a very old Syriac-Aramaic manuscript of the Four Gospels that even predates the Syriac Peshitta called Evangelion da-Mepharreshe. It contains some “textual variants”, differs from the Greek gospel manuscripts, and the now standardized, conformist approach used by most New Testament translators often copying from each other. There are two surviving editions of Evangelion da-Mepharreshe, the Curetonian Version of the Four Gospels as well as the Sinai Palimpsest, also known as The Old Syriac Gospels. Evangelion da-Mepharreshe represents a translation and “one of the earliest witnesses” of an even older collection of gospel manuscripts that no longer exist but once were “in circulation between the second and the fifth centuries”, according to page xviii of the, “Peshitta New Testament, The Antioch Bible English Translation”, Gorgias Press, discussion from the Preface about the history of the early Syriac-Aramaic manuscripts of the gospels.

In the Old Syriac-Aramaic Gospel of Matthew 3:4 John the Baptist's food is described as being "locusts and wild honey of the waste", as in honey of the wasteland or wilderness. <https://archive.org/details/cu31924092359680/page/10/mode/2up?view=theater>

There are two Greek words with almost identical spelling: 'e-g-k-r-i-d-e-s' ["egg-kre-days"] referring to carob pods, also called locust beans and Saint John's bread, as they can be

ground up into flour and used to make a kind of middle eastern flat bread or pancake. And, we also have the Greek word for locust, the insect, spelled 'a-k-r-i-d-e-s' ["ak-re-days"].

John's food, however you may define the meaning of the word 'locusts' and the meaning of 'wild honey', occurs naturally in the wild according to all the references we have, be they canonical or non-canonical, New Testament Gospels or the other gospels and writings of early Christianity.

"In ancient texts the references to "honey" in antiquity "can refer equally to honey produced by bees, or to any number of other sweet substances, including dates, figs, pods, or sap/gum from carob or other trees." (John the Baptist's Wild Honey and Honey in Antiquity, by James A. Kelhoffer)

"For this reason, [the historian] Eva Crane warns concerning possible references to bee honey in ancient civilizations:

"Unless the context makes clear a connection with hives, bees, or honeycomb, caution is warranted" ("History" 453). It is therefore difficult to ascertain which sweet substance is designated as "honey" in certain ancient writings. Yet most scholars do not even consider which type of honey the Baptist ate. Many others simply assume that he ate bee honey or sweet tree sap (sometimes referred to as honey-water), apparently unaware of the inherent ambiguity in almost any occurrence of [wild honey] without an accompanying reference to either bees or vegetation (trees). (John the Baptist's Wild Honey and Honey in Antiquity, by James A. Kelhoffer)

“John the Baptist belonged to a group of ascetics who believed in repentance and in leading an austere lifestyle. The

carob bean was seen as the diet of the lower class who normally endured hardship and exploitation from the priestly class. ***So we can conclude that JTB [John the Baptist] ate (locust plant) seed from the carob tree.***

https://wiki.answers.com/Q/Why_did_john_the_baptist_eat_locusts_and_wild_honey

Due to a mistranslation of a particular Greek word in certain gospel manuscripts John the Baptist has gained the most unfortunate caveman reputation of being a bug eater, an eater of locusts. It's supposed to be locust beans ("egkrides"), used to make a kind of Middle Eastern flat bread or cake from carob flour, not bugs ("akrides")! If we examine early Christian writings and learn of the Nasoraean movement the Prophet John was associated with, a wilderness sect operating near the Jordan River maybe somewhat related to the Essene branch of Judaism, we will discover references to the vegetarianism of John the Baptist and his disciples (Sabians, a "People of the Book"). Contemporary scholars have also recognized this and written about it.

Robert Eisenman in, James the Brother of Jesus writes:

"It has been suggested that the word 'locusts' [in the New Testament gospels] is based on a garbling from either the Hebrew or Aramaic into the Greek. A similar problem is encountered in the Book of Acts' picture of another of James' directives to overseas communities, 'to abstain from strangled things', also seemingly a garbled translation of some kind. One suggestion is that John ate 'carobs'; there have been others. Epiphanius, in preserving what he calls 'the Ebionite Gospel', rails against the passage there claiming John ate 'wild honey' and 'manna-like vegetarian cakes dipped in oil'.

"He [the church father Epiphanius complains that they substitute 'honey cakes', which had 'the taste of manna', for 'locusts'.... The 'honey' of Israel seems to have been a syrup made from either dates, carobs, or grapes, and, according to Exodus 16:31, 'manna' had the taste of 'cakes made with honey'.

"Regardless of translation problems and mis-transliteration from one language to another, it is pretty sure that John would have been one of these wilderness-dwelling, vegetable-eating persons." (Robert Eisenman)

According to the Hebrew-Ebionite Gospels, John the Baptist really ate locust (carob) beans and carob bean flour:

“Probably the most interesting of the changes from the familiar New Testament accounts of Jesus comes in the Gospel of the Ebionites description of John the Baptist, who, evidently, like his successor Jesus, maintained a strictly vegetarian cuisine.” (Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew*, pp. 102, 103)

Says Robert Eisenman in, *James the Brother of Jesus*, p. 240 —“John... was both a ‘Rechabite’ or ‘Nazarite’ and **vegetarian**”, p. 264—“One suggestion is that John ate ‘**carobs**’; there have been others. Epiphanius, in preserving what he calls ‘**the Ebionite Gospel**’, rails against the passage there claiming that **John ate ‘wild honey’ and ‘manna-like vegetarian cakes dipped in oil. ... John would have been one of those wilderness-dwelling, vegetable-**

eating persons", p. 326—"They [the Nazerini] ate nothing but wild fruit milk and honey—probably the same food that John the Baptist also ate.", p. 367—"We have already seen how in some traditions '**carobs**' were said to have been the true composition of John's food.", p. 403—"his [John's] diet was stems, roots and fruits. ***Like James and the other Nazirites/Rechabites, he is presented as a vegetarian ...***".

There is a 'vegetarian' depiction of John the Baptist's diet in the old Russian-Slavonic edition of the Book of Josephus. Josephus actually quotes John the Baptist as saying: "I am pure; [for] the Spirit of God has led me on, and [I live on] cane and roots and tree-food." Josephus says of John: "And every animal he abhorred [as food], and every wrong he rebuked, and tree-produce served him for use."

While it's likely to be true that some Christian redactors added interpolations to Slavonic Josephus, they don't seem to be very "orthodox" redactors, but added material reflecting views about John the Baptist in circulation during the early centuries. In this case this makes their interpolations a valuable contribution as they provide us with another rare glimpse into early Christian views about John the Baptist having a diet of plants, not insects. And we do find confirmation of this in other writings of the period.

Tony Burke's New Testament Apocrypha volumes have made a valuable contribution to our understanding of early Christian beliefs and history. I highly recommend all three volumes.

The Life and Martyrdom of John the Baptist supplies us with some additional context about John's wilderness diet of plants and the sap in plants as being the natural sweet substance or nature's "honey". The Life and Martyrdom of John the Baptist is attributed to Mark the Evangelist, was written in Greek, and originally studied in Syria: "So, at once he [John the Baptist] was filled with the Holy Spirit, and he traveled into the wilderness. He was brought up in the wilderness, eating tips of plants and the sap in the plants." (New Testament Apocrypha -- More Non-canonical Scriptures, Volume One, by Tony Burke)

The Life of John the Baptist by Sarapion was composed in Egypt in the Coptic language: "While holy John lived in the desert, God and his angels were with him. He led a strict ascetic life in great devoutness, did not eat anything but grass and wild honey and prayed and fasted constantly, waiting for the salvation of Israel." (New Testament Apocrypha -- More Non-canonical Scriptures, Volume One, by Tony Burke)

Don't know what to make of the grass reference, other than to say, it's once again a reference to plants, not bugs!

A footnote from New Testament Apocrypha, Volume I: "Since asceticism and devoutness generally required abstaining from eating meat altogether, many traditions [mention] a vegetarian [diet] of some sort [in connection with John the Baptist]. See James A.

Kelhoffer's book, *The Diet of John the Baptist*, for more details."

More early Christian apocryphal writings have come to light, have been made available in English. These add to the surprisingly large collection of vegetarian references in early Christian writings regarding the diet of John the Baptist. *New Testament Apocrypha*, Vol. III, by Tony Burke was published and some John the Baptist books are included. In one of the earlier volumes there was a John the Baptist text made available for the first time in English that has a vegetarian passage regarding John's diet in the wilderness. Included in the third volume are, *The Birth of Holy John the Forerunner*, and, *The Decapitation of John the Forerunner*, both containing plant-based passages about John's diet consisting of "locusts from the tree" (in the Middle east called "the Saint John's Tree", and "Carob Tree") and "wild honey", also "an abundance of bread and wild honey dripping from a rock".

Clearly there was an understanding in early Christianity that this was referring to locust beans (carob pods), not insects. Carob pods do look a bit like locusts hanging from tree branches, hence the name. Locust beans can be ground up and used to make a kind of Middle eastern carob flour flat bread. There's a "cakes dipped in honey" reference in the Gospel of the Ebionites. The wild "honey" was not from bees but sticky desert fruit of some kind.

Robert Eisenman in, *James the Brother of Jesus*, writes:
"Both carobs and figs were considered to exude 'honey'." Where the confusion or overlap of either 'fig' or 'carob' trees associated with these stories is concerned, both were considered by tradition to grow apart in rocky places and produce a kind of 'honey' that was eaten -- usually as poor man's food. In Rabbinic sources the passages 'honey out of a crag' (Deut. 32:13) and 'honey out of a rock' (Ps. 81:16) were applied to these genera of trees. Again, we have the overlap with the food ascribed in Christian sources to John.

Dr. James D. Tabor is Professor of Christian Origins and Ancient Judaism in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. He writes:

"The most commonly held view of John's diet, based on our text in Mark, is that he ate locusts, a migratory form of the grasshopper..., still commonly consumed by desert peoples in Arabia. Others have suggested the word translated "locusts" refers to the beans of the carob tree, commonly called "St. John's bread." However, the Greek word translated as "locusts" in the New Testament seems to clearly refer to a species of grasshopper. The problem is such eating of "flesh," even if that of an insect, seems to contradict the sources that emphasize John the Baptist's ascetic vegetarian ideal. Paul, for example, refers to members of the Jesus movement who abstain from eating meat and drinking wine (Romans 14:1-4). We also have

traditions that James, the brother of Jesus, practiced a strictly vegetarian lifestyle, which was also common among the Jewish Christian community that became known as the “Ebionites”. Somehow “locusts” seem out of place.

"A possible solution to this confusion about John's desert-diet is found in the fragments we have of the lost “Gospel of the Ebionites,” as quoted by the 4th-century Christian writer Epiphanius (Panarion 30.13.4-5), who hated the group but fortunately, nonetheless, can't resist quoting them, thus preserving some precious material. The Greek word for locusts is very similar to the Greek word for “honey cake” that is used for the “manna” that the Israelites ate in the desert in the days of Moses. According to this ancient text, it was not locusts but these cakes cooked in olive oil. If this is the case then John would have eaten a cake of some type, made from a desert plant, similar to the “manna” that the ancient Israelites ate in the desert in the days of Moses. This “bread from heaven” and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey” (Exodus 16:31; Numbers 11:8). This kind of “pancake” baked in oil, and sweetened with honey, would then reflect and emulate the ideal holiness of the desert wanderings of Israel when the people had to look to God alone for “daily bread.”" -- Dr. James D. Tabor: Did John the

Baptist Eat Bugs, Beans, or
Pancakes? <https://jamestabor.com/did-john-the-baptist-eat-bugs-beans-or-pancakes>

Some In the Middle East Long Ago Knew About Saint John's Bread and Carob: "Saint John's Tree"

Some describe this Saint John's bread or manna bread as being made of locust bean flour, also known as carob flour turned into a kind of Middle-eastern flat bread or pancake dipped in honey. In fact, there is some common knowledge out there by some, who know about John the Baptist eating bread made of locust bean flour, carob bean flour. Some in the Greek Orthodox Church, Eastern Orthodoxy, and other forms of Christianity are already aware of this understanding about the vegetarian diet of John the Baptist, that it was locust bean flour, not locusts, as in insects. If you google "Saint John's Bread", you'll find quite a few references to this on the web. For instance, this article: 'St. John's bread' comes from carob pods of the carob tree: <https://www.redlandsdailyfacts.com/2009/10/28/st-johns-bread-grows-on-carob-tree>

"The Carob tree, also known as St. John's bread, is a native to the eastern Mediterranean region and Israel where it grows naturally as a hedge. The term "St. John's bread" is because the seeds and sweet pulp of this tree were supposedly the "locust and wild honey" St. John ate the wilderness."

Some Thoughts About This Cautionary Tale of Venerating Mistaken Translations as Divinely Inspired, and Being Forever Trapped by the Traditions of Men Unable to Learn New Things, or in This Case, Very Old Views About the Diet of John the Baptist

In other words, the manuscript copyists of the New Testament made a mistake, choosing a different Greek word: meaning locust the insect, instead of locust beans. When presented with the locust flour cake or bread reference found in another gospel text... the Gospel of the Ebionites... Epiphanius, *who was from Cyprus and lived during the 4th century*, wrongly assumed the mistaken version he was familiar with in the gospels to be correct, and the correct version preserved in the Gospel of the Ebionites to be in error. A mistaken translation in some Greek manuscripts of the New Testament gospels is made into something holy, inspired, sacrosanct, and divine, *and he dismisses the evidence from the oldest version of Christianity in antiquity, that of the Jesus Movement, the early church, preserved in one of the gospels of the Hebrew Christians...* the Gospel of the Ebionites.

Christianity Before Paul (The Original Hebrew Christians or Ebionites) and the Essene Connection

The editing out of vegetarian sayings, (scroll down and see below the reference to the Aramaic-Syriac translation of Luke 21:34, Evangelion Da-Mepharreshe), adding fish to the Feeding of the Five Thousand in second century Greek manuscripts, and translators choosing the word “locust” instead of carob, giving John the Baptist an unusual diet of bugs, are all troubling examples of slanting the translations or tampering with texts—adding meat to the menu. We know that Roman culture and later European church traditions were OK with eating meat. ***What interests me however is the diet of Jesus and the first Christians, not the dietary preferences of Roman translators of manuscripts centuries later.***

It needs to be said that the familiar Western or European canon of scripture seemingly allied with Saint Paul, does not even claim to be representing the teachings of the Apostles, the original inner circle of Jesus’s disciples, the first Christians.

Paul did advocate that it was OK for new converts to eat meat, but he himself supplies us with evidence in his own letters (‘epistles’) dating back to the early decades of the First Century AD (around 50 AD) that others in early Christianity disagreed with him about diet and many other issues. It turns out that Paul dropped the vegetarian requirement for his new gentile converts. If you read his New Testament Epistle to the Galatians closely, you can notice there was quite a bit of tension between Paul and the original Jesus Movement based in Jerusalem (‘the others’). In his writings Paul gives them ‘left-handed compliments,’ calls them “weak,” “of the circumcision,” and even “Judaizers.” Clearly, he was not close to them but

had a strained, frosty, distant, awkward relationship with the original disciples of Jesus. Given their solid credibility and affiliation with Jesus however, Paul couldn't completely come out and denounce them, but he does greatly marginalize them. They are barely mentioned at all. There's a few short writings not authored by Paul near the end—at the back of the book—not many of their scriptures got included in the New Testament.

Those in the Jerusalem part of the Jesus movement, Jesus' own family and spiritual successors headed by the Apostle James the Just, the brother of Jesus and next leader of the Aramaic-speaking Jerusalem community, were all vegetarians. They disagreed with Paul's sect about diet, believing that Jewish and gentile followers of Jesus, including new converts, should all be vegetarians, and have nothing whatsoever to do with religious rituals pertaining to animal sacrifice ("eating meat that has been sacrificed to pagan idols").

How could it be that Jesus' own family, the actual group of direct, spiritual successors and first disciples, would have it all wrong about diet, and forms of Christianity that were founded decades and centuries later, got it right? The truth of the matter is that the Hebrew gospels did not portray Jesus as eating fish or Passover lamb, and in those gospels, John the Baptist did not eat any insects. Paul's group, and those sects that emerged later on in Europe claiming succession from Paul, had their literature, but so did the Ebionites, the Hebrew Christians. There were pro-meat gospels intended for gentile readers in the Roman world as we all know, but there were also vegetarian gospels directly associated with the Christ followers (Hebrew Christians): the

Hebrew Gospel of Matthew, Hebrew Logia of Matthew, the Gospel of the Hebrews, the Gospel of the Nazarenes, the Gospel of the Ebionites, and other Ebionite and pro-Nasoraean literature including the Clementine Homilies and the Recognitions of Clement, a kind of Ebionite Book of Acts. These are not ‘channeled’ or recently composed writings, but scriptures that have long been known to scholars and were used by other branches of Christianity from the Middle East in antiquity. What survives of these scriptures can be found on the shelves of most seminary libraries. Sometimes these books are called “extra-canonical writings”, “apocrypha”, or “lost books of the Bible.” These are books of someone else’s Bible or collection of scriptures—in other words, sacred texts once used by other forms of Apostolic or indigenous Christianity long ago in Israel, Syria (Mesopotamia), Turkey (Asia Minor), Egypt, Ethiopia, the Mediterranean region, etc...

The Jewish Christians called themselves “The Ebionites.” “Ebionite” is a word derived from Hebrew meaning: “The Poor,” and were the first Christian community described in the New Testament Acts of the Apostles (4:32–35), a spiritual or intentional community that shared all of their possessions in common.

The Biblical Basis For Vegetarianism

The Genesis ideal presented in the early chapters of the Hebrew Bible is vegetarian. The Plant-Based-Diet of Eden:

“Behold, I have given you every seed-bearing herb which is upon the surface of the entire earth, and every tree that has

seed-bearing fruit; it will be yours for food.”(Hebrew Book of Genesis 1:29, a translation quoted at a vegan Kabbalah website)

Only after the ‘Fall of Man’ and post ‘Flood’ phases is there meat-eating according to Genesis, and ritual animal sacrifice.

Quite often, spiritual movements advocating going back to Eden, re-entering a heavenly paradise, entering into a golden age, millennium, kingdom of God, or mystical reunion with God include vegetarianism as part of their spiritual path. From the beginning and across the many centuries there have always been vegetarian Jewish movements, the Nazarites, Essenes, Sethians, Therapeutae and many others.

The Essenes were one of the three major branches of Judaism, and predates Jesus and Christianity at least by a couple of centuries. During the First Century AD, the Essenes were opposed to animal sacrifices being made in the Jewish temple and they were also known to be vegetarians. The Essenes were the group that Jesus and the first Christians, the Ebionites, were closest to, sharing with them many of the same values and sacred texts. Unlike the Sadducees and Pharisees, the Essenes are never criticized in the New Testament. The Hebrew church was largely populated by messianic Essenes.

This earlier Essene movement within Judaism adhered to a vegetarian diet, and had also been opposed to animal sacrifice in the temple of Jerusalem. That is the context within Judaism. The Essenes (of Dead Sea Scrolls fame), the John the Baptist group, the Mandaean Gnostics (also known as

Nazarenes, Nasuraiia or Nasoraeans) and the Jesus movement had much in common and are related to each other. For instance, followers of the original Jesus movement are sometime called Ebionites, and that term Ebionite also appears in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Scholars continue to debate the exact nature of their relationship. In any case, these groups shared many of the same values, scriptures, and spiritual beliefs.

The Essene-like Community of the Therapeutae, The Children of the Dawn

With the people of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Essenes, we mainly have their writings with few descriptions of the sect. With the Therapeutae we don't have their scriptures but there are detailed accounts of daily life in their community.

Like the Essene community at Qumran near the Dead Sea, where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found, the Therapeutae community was also located near a large body of water: Lake Mariout, just outside the city of Alexandria in Egypt.

Like the Essenes, the Therapeutae were vegetarians: "...And the table, too, is kept clear of animal flesh, nothing which has blood, but there is placed upon it bread for food and salt for seasoning, to which also hyssop is sometimes added..." (Philo of Alexandria, *On The Contemplative Life*, where you can learn more about the Therapeutae community)

A Vegetarian Ideal Described by Isaiah in the Book of Isaiah 11:6–9

The prophecy described in the Hebrew Bible, the Book of Isaiah 11:6–9 foresees a return to a vegetarian world like that described in the earliest chapters of the Book of Genesis—back to Eden, where the cow, bear, snake, and the children of humanity coexist in peace. Lambs and wolves will feed together and lions will be vegetarians again:

*“The wolf will live with the lamb,
the leopard will lie down with the goat,
the calf and the lion and the yearling together;
and a little child will lead them.
The cow will feed with the bear,
their young will lie down together,
and the lion will eat straw like the ox.”*

The New Testament Book of Revelation 21:4 adds: “He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death, or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

For the Essene branch of Judaism (of Dead Sea Scrolls fame) the Book of Isaiah was a very central text. Many copies of it were discovered at the Essene library of Qumran. Isaiah was a favorite text of the Hebrew Christians as well, along with another book known as the Ascension of Isaiah.

Dr. Will Tuttle, author of, *The World Peace Diet*, once told me that for most of the last two thousand years those who have been either vegans or vegetarians have been called “Pythagoreans”, till relatively recently in history when terms like “vegan” and “vegetarian” got coined. Such has been the

lasting legacy of Pythagoras upon the West. Though in the Greek world of antiquity, the Pythagoreans were a significant influence on many—were major advocates of vegetarianism and discontinuing religious ritual animal sacrifices in various temples—from passages such as Genesis 1:29, Isaiah 11:6–9, Hosea 6:6 and others, one can understand why ***Jews and Christians during the late B.C. and early A.D. period could easily see a Biblical basis for their vegetarianism.***

If the way of peaceful vegetarianism is the Divine ideal —“Thy Kingdom Come, Thy Will Be Done”—why postpone it for millennia, relegating it to some far away time in the deep distant future? Why not follow the examples of the Essenes and Ebionite Christians and step into this vegetarian ideal today, catching a glimpse of the golden age or paradise right now in the living present? #AssistingIsaiah #BackToEden

A Reflection About Saint Paul’s Leniency For New Converts

“So if what I eat causes another believer to sin, I will never eat meat again as long as I live—for I don’t want to cause another believer to stumble.” (Paul, 1 Corinthians 8:13)

As we see below, the Gnostics were vegetarians, as were some of those early Catholic/Orthodox church fathers as well as the followers of Marcion of Sinope. These held Paul in extremely high regard, so how could Paul really have been the enemy, the opponent of vegetarianism? Maybe he wasn't! Perhaps at the heart of his dispute with the original disciples of Jesus and Jerusalem Apostles was how he wished to structure his new community of gentile believers. Some in

early Christianity developed a two-fold or two-level organisational approach of:

- 1) “Hearers of the Word”, new converts to the faith, and
- 2): “the Elect”, those initiates of the Mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven more mature who were “being perfected in love and knowledge” adhering to a stricter discipline that included vegetarianism.

Some successors of Paul certainly did follow this twofold or two-tiered approach in their communities, including the part about the Elect initiates adhering to a vegetarian diet. I suspect Paul did too.

The Hebrew Christians however did not have a two-tiered format: one for new converts or gentile believers, and another for Jews more established in wisdom and knowledge. They only had the one level and ethical standard for all.



Uncovering a Vegetarian Jesus (Yeshua) at the Beginning of Christianity

The Nasaraeans According to the Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis, Book One, Translated by Frank Williams

Epiphanius mentioned an ancient sect called the Nasaraeans. They are related to the Ebionites. Sometimes he spells their name Nazoraean. There are many variant spellings of this term including Nasoraean, also traditionally used for both the John the Baptist sect and later on, the Mandaeans. Sometimes Epiphanius describes the Nasaraeans as a Jewish

sect existing prior to the time of Christ. At other times he associates them with Jesus the Nazoraean and the Jesus movement, a sect within Judaism but adhering to a vegetarian diet and being opposed to animal sacrifices in the temple very much like the Essenes. In various gospels Jesus is portrayed as a follower of John the Baptist who began his own mission after the death of John, becoming his spiritual successor.

Thus, it makes sense that both branches of the John the Baptist sect shared the same name. Below are a couple of passages from Epiphanius along with some footnotes from the translator.

"Nasaraeans, meaning 'rebels,' who forbid the eating of any meat and do not partake of living things at all. They have the holy names of patriarchs which are in the Pentateuch, up through Moses and Joshua the son of Nun, and they believe in them — I mean Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the earliest ones, and Moses himself, and Aaron, and Joshua. But they hold that the scriptures of the Pentateuch are not Moses' scriptures, and maintain that they have others besides these."

Against Nasaraeans,²⁷ Sect five from Judaism but eighteen of the series

"Next I shall undertake to describe the sect after the Hemerobaptists, called the sect of the Nasaraeans. They are Jews by nationality, from Gileaditis, Bashanitis and the Transjordan as I have been told, but descendants of Israel himself. This sect practices Judaism in all respects and have scarcely any beliefs beyond the ones that I have mentioned. It too had been given circumcision, and it kept the same

Sabbath and observed the same festivals, and certainly did not inculcate fate or astrology.

"It also recognized as fathers the persons in the Pentateuch from Adam to Moses who were illustrious for the excellence of their piety—I mean Adam, Seth, Enoch, Methuselah, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Levi and Aaron, Moses and Joshua the son of Nun. However, it would not accept the Pentateuch itself. It acknowledged Moses and believed that he had received legislation—not this legislation though, they said, but some other.²⁸ (4) And so, though they were Jews who kept all the Jewish observances, they would not offer sacrifice or eat meat." ²⁹

27 This group has some traits in common with the Mandaeans, whose usual name for themselves is “Nazoraeans”, and who reject the Pentateuch.

28 Jews are said to falsify the Law and the works of Abraham at the Mandaean Ginza 43,21-23.

29 Animal sacrifices are, in effect, termed obsolete in the NHC tractate Gos. Phil. 54,34-55,1; they are also deprecated at Gos. Phil. 62,35-63,4 and Melch. 6,28-7,1.

Epiphanius quotes the Ebionite or Hebrew Gospel, as ascribing these words to Jesus: ‘***I have come to destroy the sacrifices***’ (Panarion 30.16.5), and as ascribing to Jesus’ rejection of the Passover meat (Panarion 30.22.4), and these are analogous to numerous passages found in the Recognitions and Homilies (e.g., Recognitions 1.36, 1.54 and Homilies 3.45, 7.4, 7.8).

“**Baptism Instituted in Place of Sacrifices:** But when the time began to draw near that what was wanting in the Mosaic institutions should be supplied, as we have said, and that the Prophet should appear, of whom he had foretold that He should warn them by the mercy of God to cease from sacrificing; lest haply they might suppose that on the cessation of sacrifice there was no remission of sins for them, He instituted baptism by water amongst them, in which they might be absolved from all their sins on the invocation of His name, and for the future, following a perfect life, might abide in immortality, being purified **not by the blood of beasts**, but by the purification of the Wisdom of God.” (Recognitions 1.39)

"... offerings of first-fruits ..., because the priest of the Exalted One accepts first-fruits, and these he brings as burnt offerings and sacrificial offerings. I, however, am not of this kind, but offerings of first-fruits from the Indestructible One I bear up to Heaven and outspread them, so that the power of the Truth can appear, because what is destructible has ascended to what is Indestructible..." (from a saying attributed to Jesus excerpted from, The First Apocalypse of James)

From the footnotes on the above passage: "The first-fruits were offered during the Feast of Shavuot. This seems to be an Ebionite-like polemic against sacrifices. Exactly what kind of symbolic sacrifice Jesus alludes to here becomes clear from NH page 42's 'the first-fruits of knowledge'. "'What is destructible,' i.e., physical sacrifices." (Samuel Zinner, edited by Mark Mattison and Rachel Bousfield: <https://othergospels.com/1james>)

"Professor Bart Ehrman writes in, *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew*: "It appears that Ebionite Christians also believed that since Jesus was the perfect, ultimate, final sacrifice for sins, there was no longer any need for the ritual sacrifice of animals.

Jewish sacrifices, therefore, were understood to be a temporary and imperfect measure provided by God to atone for sins until the perfect atoning sacrifice should be made. As a result, if these (Christian) Jews were in existence before the destruction of the Jewish Temple in 70 CE, they would not have participated in its cultic practices; later they, or at least some of them, evidently remained vegetarian, since in the ancient world the slaughter of animals for meat was almost always done in the context of a cultic act of worship. (meat sacrificed to idols.)

"If the Ebionites had established themselves as dominant, then things would be radically different for Christians today. Christianity would be not a religion that was separate from Judaism but a sect of Judaism, a sect that accepted Jewish laws, customs, and ways, a sect that observed Jewish holy days such as Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashana and other festivals, a sect that kept kosher food laws and ... maintained a vegetarian diet."

The Ebionite or Hebrew Gospel quotes Jesus as saying, "***I have come to abolish the sacrifices***, and if you cease not from sacrificing, my wrath will not cease from you." (Panarion 30.16.5)

A Sethian passage from the Gospel of Judas: "And Jesus said to them: 'Stop the animal sacrifices which you offered up on

the altar.'" In a footnote at the bottom of the Gospel of Judas page at OtherGospels.com, the translator, Samuel Zinner, also provides another translation of the saying quoted in the Panarion from the Gospel of the Ebionites attributed to Jesus: "I have come to abolish sacrifices; and if you do not stop sacrificing, the anger of God will fall on you."

According to the Gospel of the Ebionites, Jesus also rejected the Passover meal:

“Where wilt Thou that we prepare for Thee to eat the Passover?”

To which he replied:

“I have no desire to eat the flesh of this Paschal Lamb with you.”

Jesus Stopping Animal Sacrifice in the Temple

“The dispute over vegetarianism in the early church shows that the leadership of the Jerusalem church was vegetarian. The later history of Jewish Christianity indicates that Jewish Christianity was vegetarian and preserved this tradition of defending animals. Jesus’ attack on the animal sacrifice business demonstrates that Jesus himself shared these views.” (Was Jesus a vegetarian? <https://www.compassionatespirit.com/wpblog/2015/12/01/was-jesus-a-vegetarian/#more-2512>)

“When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ***In the Temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep and doves*** and others sitting at tables exchanging money. So he made a whip out of cords and drove all from the Temple, both ***sheep and cattle***; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. ***To those who sold doves he said: ‘Get out of here.’*** (John 2:13–16)

Most remember the part about Jesus overturning the tables of the money-changers in the temple, but the pro-meat bias most have inherited makes it more difficult to get the significance of the anti-animal sacrifice, freeing the animals aspect of the story.

“Go and find out what is meant by the scripture that says: ‘It is kindness that I want, ***not animal sacrifices.***’” (Jesus, Gospel of Matthew 9:13, Good News translation) Here Jesus was referring to a passage in the Hebrew Bible that was very popular with the Essenes, the vegetarian branch of Judaism that rejected sacrifices in the temple of Jerusalem. Hosea 6:6: “For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgement of God rather than burnt offerings.”

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.” (Gospel of Matthew, a saying attributed to Jesus from a Syriac-Aramaic manuscript)

This same old Syriac-Aramaic manuscript also preserves a vegetarian saying attributed to Jesus. I find it fascinating that both the saying above and this one appear to be slightly longer in this manuscript than their counterparts in the Greek New Testament, and the Greek manuscripts of Luke have the vegetarian part of Luke 21:34 edited out.

A Vegetarian Saying of Jesus in the Old Syriac-Aramaic Manuscript of the Gospel of Luke: “Be on guard, so that your hearts do not become heavy with the eating of flesh and with the intoxication of wine and with the anxiety of the world, and that day come upon you suddenly; for as a snare it will come upon all who dwell upon the surface of the earth.” (Jesus, Luke 21:34, *Evangelion Da-Mepharreshe—Old Syriac-Aramaic Manuscript of the New Testament Gospels*)

Vegetarianism and the Yoke of the Lord in the Didache (The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles)

In an early Christian text called the Didache is a statement to new gentile converts to do the best they can, giving them time to adjust or transition to the ethical ideals of the Jesus Movement: "If thou art able to bear the whole yoke of the Lord, thou wilt be perfect. But if thou art not able, what thou art able, that do. But concerning meat, bear that which thou art able to do. But keep with care from things sacrificed to idols, for it is the worship of the infernal deities."

"The Yoke of the Lord" was a term for the ethical code of the Jesus movement according to the Didache, an early witness to vegetarianism at a time when some of the first gentiles became interested in following Christ. Vegetarianism was part of the Yoke of the Lord and here very opposed to even new converts from day one eating meat sacrificed to idols ("the worship of dead gods" as it's rendered in another translation). Whoever composed that section of the Didache was part of a sect closer to the James the Just branch than Paul's version of Christianity. See Didache, chapter 6: <https://othergospels.com/didache>

Pliny the Younger, in his letter to Trajan (ca. 113) mentions a Christian communal meal consisting of "harmless food":

"It was their habit on a fixed day to assemble before daylight and sing by turns a hymn to Christ as a god; and that they bind themselves with an oath, not for any crime, but not to commit theft or robbery or adultery, not to break their word, and not to deny a deposit when demanded. After this was done, their custom was to depart and meet together again to take food, but ordinary and harmless food." (Readings in World History: Volume I: Earliest Christianity to 1453, by John W. Coakley and Andrea Sterk, page 24)

One of the earliest pro-Ebionite Christian documents is the Clementine Homilies, a work based on the teachings of Saint Peter. Homily XII states:

“The unnatural eating of flesh meats is as polluting as the heathen worship of devils, with its sacrifices and its

impure feasts, through participation in it a man becomes a fellow eater with devils.” (Saint Peter, Clementine Homilies)

Paul however was OK with the practice of eating meat sacrificed to idols that came from various pagan temples. But, like their Essene ancestors, the original Jesus Movement categorically rejected this. The author of the Book of Revelation in the New Testament also denounced this practice. See Book of Revelation 2:12–17: “There are some among you who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin so that they ate meat sacrificed to idols...”. This passage from Revelation actually contradicts other verses in the New Testament authored by Paul. But... as I mentioned earlier, Paul might have had a different approach where it was OK for new converts (“Hearers of the Word”) to continue eating meat, for awhile at least, but perhaps he had in mind a stricter moral code and spiritual discipline for those growing more mature who eventually would be perfected in love and knowledge (gnosis as part of the inner circle of initiates known as “The Elect”).

The Vegetarian Apostles (Leadership of the Original Jesus Movement)

The first followers of Jesus, also known as Ebionites or Nazoreans, were not only kosher, but strictly adhered to a totally vegetarian diet.

The largest surviving collection of Ebionite scriptures is the Clementine Homilies and the Recognitions of Clement, which are vegetarian gospels that condemn animal sacrifice in any

form. For example, the Book of Homilies states that God does not want animals killed at all (3.45), and condemns those who eat meat (7.4, 7.8).

And the passages below also show that the Ebionites' diet was vegan—plant-based (no eggs, no dairy, no animal products mentioned).

“And the things which are well-pleasing to God are these: to pray to Him, to ask from Him, recognising that He is the giver of all things, and gives with discriminating law; to abstain from the table of devils, ***not to taste dead flesh***, not to touch blood; to be washed from all pollution; and the rest in one word,—as the God-fearing Jews have heard, do you also hear, and be of one mind in many bodies; let each man be minded to do to his neighbour those good things he wishes for himself.” (Clementine Homilies 7.4)

“They [the Apostles] embraced and persevered in a strenuous and a laborious life, with fasting and abstinence from wine and meat.” (Eusebius, church father, Demonstratio Evangelica or “Proof of the Gospels”)

Peter: "Then Peter answered: 'To do anything for pleasure, not for the sake of necessity, is to sin and therefore I earnestly entreat you to abstain from all animal food, in the hope that by this you may be able to retain your self-restraint, and not to be overpowered by the allurements of pleasure. For in the beginning, the eating of flesh was unknown until after the flood, when, against their will, men were compelled to use the flesh of animals, because all things that were planted had been destroyed by the waters... But let no one think that by

abstinence from things offered to idols he will fulfill the law. For what commands us to keep ourselves from idolatry also teaches us that we should eat only of the fruits of trees and seeds and plants, and abstain from all animal food, and from all injury of animals; and with regard to our food, that it should be purely vegetable." (Why God Has Forbidden Certain Foods, Book of the Clementine Homilies)

Peter said, "I live on olives and bread, to which I rarely only add vegetables." (Clementine Homilies 12,6; also see, Recognitions 7,6) And the earlier quoted vegetarian verse attributed to Peter is worth repeating again here: "The unnatural eating of flesh meats is as polluting as the heathen worship of devils, with its sacrifices and its impure feasts, through participation in it a man becomes a fellow eater with devils." (Saint Peter, Clementine Homilies)

Matthew: "And happiness is found in the practice of virtue. Accordingly, the Apostle Matthew partook of seeds, and nuts, hard-shelled fruits, and vegetables, without flesh." (Clement of Alexandria, The Instructor, Book 2, Chapter 1)

The Apostle Thomas: "He continually fasts and prays, and abstaining from the eating of flesh and the drinking wine, he eats only bread with salt, drinks only water, and wears the same garment in fine weather and winter, accepting nothing from anyone, and gives whatever he has to others." (Acts of Thomas, chapter 20)

The Gospel of Philip: "The Gospel of Philip is a Jewish-Christian treatise traditionally attributed to Philip, one of the twelve apostles. Unlike most gospels, Philip presents a

systematic theology that explains Christian tradition in the context of the Jewish Law." (from the Introduction to the text)

This World is an Eater of Corpses

Gospel of Philip 10:10: "This world is a corpse-eater." The footnote about this passage from the translator at the bottom of the page comments: "This refers to the state of the world-system, in which people live by killing and eating dead animals. The contrast is with the Truth-system, in which people eat what is alive, namely, (Eucharistic) bread. The contrast echoes Thomas 11, which may refer to meat-eaters as opposed to vegetarians." (Samuel Zinner, edited by Mark Mattison and Rachel Bousfield: <https://othergospels.com/philip>)

There is also a recent translation of an early Christian scripture called the **Acts of Philip**, a fuller more complete edition discovered at a monastery library in Greece. It contains some very charming animal stories: The Acts of Philip: A New Translation, by François Bovon and Christopher R. Matthews, ISBN-10: 1602586551, and, ISBN-13: 978-1602586550.

James the Just, Brother of Jesus, Head Apostle and the Next Leader of the Church, was a Vegetarian

Jesus had a brother. He's referred to by scholars and historians as "James the Just". According to a wide variety of sources, James became Jesus's spiritual successor, the next

leader of this group, referred to as the “Hebrew Christians” or “Ebionites”.

James became the successor of Christ and next leader of the Jesus Movement! The Gospel of Thomas, Saying 12: “The disciples said to Jesus; ‘We are aware that you will depart from us. Who will be our leader?’ Jesus said to him, ‘***No matter where you come, it is to James the Just that you shall go,*** for whose sake heaven and earth have come to exist.’” (Bently Layton’s translation)

Though never seeing eye-to-eye with the original Jerusalem community on many things including the issue of meat eating, in his epistles even Paul the rogue Apostle, confirms this leadership role of James the Just, “the Lord’s brother” in Jerusalem, and he himself went to visit him to seek his blessings on a couple of occasions.

“James was a vegetarian.” (Prof. Robert Eisenman in, James the Just, The Key to Unlocking the Secrets of Early Christianity and the Dead Sea Scrolls)

“James, the brother of the Lord, lived on seeds and plants and touched neither meat nor wine.” (Epistulae ad Faustum XXII, 3)

“James, the brother of the Lord was holy from his mothers womb; and he drank no wine nor strong drink, ***nor did he eat flesh.***” (Hegesippus, quoted in The Church History of Eusebius, book 2, chapter 23)

And furthermore, wouldn't everyone in Jesus's family—brothers and sisters—be following the same diet and ethical code? On what planet would parents raise one child vegetarian from birth but another gets raised as a meat-eater?

Keith Akers makes some great observations in his article, Was Jesus A Vegetarian? “Eusebius says that James the brother of Jesus was a vegetarian, and in fact was evidently raised as a vegetarian (Ecclesiastical History 2.23). Why would Jesus' parents have raised James as a vegetarian, unless they were vegetarian themselves and raised Jesus as a vegetarian as well? Eusebius also states (Proof of the Gospel 3.5) that all ***the Apostles abstained from meat and wine.***”

Church Fathers And Other Later Voices Affirming the Existence of the Earlier Veg Tradition

“Jacobus [James], the brother of Jesus, lived of seeds and vegetables and did not accept meat or wine.” (Saint Augustine)

“The consumption of animal flesh was unknown up until the great flood. But since the great flood, we have had animal flesh stuffed into our mouths. Jesus, the Christ, who appeared when the time was fulfilled, again joined the end to the beginning, so that ***we are now no longer allowed to eat animal flesh.***” (pro-vegetarian early church father Hieronymus [St. Jerome] who apparently read the Gospel of the Hebrews and was influenced by Ebionite views)

“The eating of meat was unknown up to the big flood, but since the flood they have the strings and stinking juices of animal meat into our mouths, just as they threw in front of the grumbling sensual people in the desert. Jesus Christ, who appeared when the time had been fulfilled, has again joined the end with the beginning, so that ***it is no longer allowed for us to eat animal meat.***” (another version of the same passage attributed to Saint Jerome/Hieronymus)

“Sacrifices were invented by men to be a pretext for eating flesh.” (Clement of Alexandria)

Origen of Alexandria “...was a teetotaler and a ***vegetarian*** and he often fasted for long periods of time.” (Wikipedia, citing Greggs 2009, p. 102., and McGuckin 2004, p. 6.)

“The steam of ***meat meals darkens the spirit.*** One can hardly have virtue if one enjoys meat meals and feasts. ***In the earthly paradise [Eden], no one sacrificed animals, and no one ate meat.***” (Saint Basil the Great)

The Gnostics Were Vegetarians

Gnostic groups are described as being vegetarian. The Prayer of Thanksgiving, one of the Nag Hammadi books, mentions a vegetarian meal taking place at one of their meetings (a Hermetic or Gnostic sect). The Manichaean Gnostics were known for their vegetarianism. The Prophet Mani's parents were followers of the Elkasites, which was a slightly later Jewish-Christian sect related to the Ebionites. They were

vegetarians. Mani was veg, and his inner circle of followers or initiates also were veg.

Elaine Pagels briefly discusses the connection between a veg Gnostic passage and Indian philosophy in her book, The Gnostic Gospels, quoting the early church father Hippolytus:

“There is...among the Indians a heresy of those who philosophize among the Brahmins, who live a self sufficient life, ***abstaining from eating living creatures*** and all cooked food... They say that God is Light, not like the Light one sees, nor like the sun nor fire, but to them God is Discourse, not that which finds expression in articulate sounds, but that of knowledge, or gnosis, through which the secret mysteries of nature are perceived by the wise.” (Hippolytus, Refutation Omnium Haeresium)

Vegetarian Prayer of Thanksgiving in the Nag Hammadi Library (Gnostic Gospels) and Corpus Hermeticum

This the prayer that they spoke:

*“We give thanks to You!
Every soul and heart is lifted up to You,
undisturbed name, honored with the name ‘God’
and praised with the name ‘Father’,
for to everyone and everything (comes) the fatherly kindness
and affection and love,
and any teaching there may be that is sweet and plain,*

*giving us mind, speech, (and) knowledge:
mind, so that we may understand You,
speech, so that we may expound You,
knowledge, so that we may know You.
We rejoice, having been illuminated by Your knowledge.
We rejoice because You have shown us Yourself.
We rejoice because while we are in (the) body,
You have made us divine through Your knowledge.*

*“The thanksgiving of the one who attains to You is one thing:
that we know You.
We have known You, Light of mind.
Life of life, we have known You.
Womb of every creature, we have known You.
Womb pregnant with the nature of the Father,
we have known You.
Eternal permanence of the begetting Father,
thus have we worshipped Your goodness.*

*“There is one petition that we ask:
we would be preserved in knowledge.
And there is one protection that we desire:
that we not stumble in this kind of life.”*

*“When they had said these things in the prayer, they
embraced each
other **and they went to eat their holy food, which has no
blood in it.**” **

-- The Prayer of Thanksgiving @ Gnosis.org:
<http://www.gnosis.org/naghamm/prat.html>

* ***“Vegetarian food”***—footnote from the Marvin Meyer translation of this in, The Gnostic Scriptures.

This passage is also found in the Epilogue of Asclepius, in “HERMETICA,” translated by Sir Walter Scott: ***“Having prayed thus, let us betake ourselves to a meal unpolluted by flesh [animalia] of living things.”***

The G.R.S. Mead translation of the same verse: ***“With this desire we now betake us to our pure and fleshless meal.”***

“With such hopes we turn to a pure meal that includes no living thing.” (Asclepius, translated in “Hermetica”, Brian Copenhaver, Cambridge University Press)

Also see, The Prayer of Thanksgiving @ OtherGospels.com:
<https://othergospels.com/thanksgiving>

Some Early Church orthodox “Heresy Hunters” used to require meat-eating on Sundays as ***a way to discover who the vegetarian Gnostics were in their midst!*** Since Gnostics were generally vegetarians, anyone refusing to partake of fleshly meals would be suspected of heresy:

“While the initial cause for Gnostic vegetarianism has been unknown in the past, many classical Christian authors have documented the Gnostic’s widespread practice of vegetarianism. In a 4th Century Christian document it attests that ‘Heretical Gnostic Christians were still so common, and there were so many Gnostic Heretics among the clergy and monks in Egypt that in the region of Theodosius Egypt, the Patriarch Timothy made eating meat compulsory on Sundays,

as a way to flush out the vegetarian Gnostics.” (Luke Meyers,
“Gnostic Visions”)

Inter-Faith Love!

The following passage is from the Recognitions of Clement.

This Ebionite Christian author has very nice things to say about those in India who worship One God, follow peaceful customs and laws, and are vegetarian or vegan. Imagine! Clearly he sees parallels between his own religion and that of his brothers and sisters “in the Indian countries.” (Two thousand years ago India was divided up into many kingdoms.) This is one of the most amazing passages I know of in the extra-canonical scriptures, as it is a rare example of one religion (Ebionite, Hebrew Christianity) recognizing “Truth” in another religion (Hinduism), a rare inter-faith moment in human history. The Recognitions of Clement, and The Clementine Homilies are surviving Jewish-Christian texts representing an Ebionite vegetarian point of view:

*“There are likewise amongst the Bactrians,
in the Indian countries,
immense multitudes of Brahmans,
who also themselves,
from the tradition of their ancestors,
and peaceful customs and laws,
neither commit murder nor adultery,
nor worship idols,
nor have the practice of eating animal food,
are never drunk,
never do anything maliciously,
but always revere God.”*

— Recognitions of Clement, Book 9, Chapter 22, Brahmans, Volume Eight, of the, Ante-Nicene Fathers, page 187, T & T Clark Eerdmans edition.

*"Countless there are that remember Thee, and countless
those that love Thee;
Countless there are that recite from sacred books Thy
praises;
Countless those Thy devotees who contemplate Thy
attributes and wisdom; and
Countless those that practice truth and charity;
Countless those who have vowed silence, and meditate on
Thee with unceasing love."*

-- excerpted from the Morning Prayer of Guru Nanak

Wisdom from the East, The Saints of India

That passage above from Saint Basil the Great mentioning that meals of meat darkens the spirit reminds me of a saying of the Buddha: "The eating of meat extinguishes the seed of great compassion."

Our Ebionite friends would really love Kabir and the Sants of India, finding them to be kindred spirits and friends of God!

The harshest words that Kabir, a great spiritual Master and poet-mystic from Northern India (loved by Sufis, Sikhs,

Buddhists, Jains, Sants and Hindus alike) ever spoke were directed against the slaughter or consumption of innocent animals. Kabir says, “Keep away from the man who eats meat —his company will ruin your meditation.”

It's hard to reach more subtle states of tranquility in meditation on an animal flesh diet based on the suffering of other beings.

“I must point out that animal food, even if a single particle is eaten, is detrimental to spiritual progress.” (Hazur Baba Sawan Singh)

The following, on the reason why disciples of Santmat advocate following the vegetarian diet, is by Swami Santsevi Ji Maharaj from the book, *The Harmony of All Religions* (Sarvadharm Samanvy), published by Maharshi Mehi Ashram:

“The saints have addressed the sin of violence with particular attention to the foods which are eaten. Foods which are produced by killing living beings, as well as foods which are not pure and fresh, are considered tamasic. Consumption of these is prohibited by the teachings of the saints. This includes animal products such as meat, fish, and eggs. These foods inhibit the clarity of the mind and the health of the body. There is an old saying: ‘Whatever kind of food we take in, its properties will also fill our mind.’ A parallel saying is, ‘Whatever we eat, just so will our breath smell [indicates the visible effect of food].’

Further, Kabir Sahab says: ‘The kind of food and drink which we consume directly influences how our mind will become.

Even the quality of water which we drink will influence our speech.’ These words of Kabir Sahib are not merely rhetorical conjecture, but represent direct experience...

“A great yogi named Bhupendranath Ji Sanyal has said: ‘It is preferable to always avoid the consumption of flesh and fish. This is because in the very cells of these animals there might be bad diseases. But even more significantly, the natural vibration of these creatures is absorbed into the blood. This can create agitation and even sickness, and will destroy the natural calmness of the mind. Also, one must not take intoxicants, as this is a great breach of the spiritual path and natural duty (dharma). [Under the influence of intoxicants people are unable to discern the right path of action].’

“Therefore, we must be disciplined in what we eat and drink, and by being disciplined, our wealth and spiritual path are protected. This world becomes agreeable, and so does the next world, since we won’t be incurring the karmas from killing other living beings.” (Beloved Swami Santsevi Ji Maharaj, Sant Mat, the Path of the Masters)

All past and present Masters of Sant Mat, the most advanced Saints of Inner Light and Sound, advocate following the vegetarian diet. In fact, being vegetarian is a requirement in order to be initiated into the meditation practice of Sant Mat, Surat Shabd Yoga, Meditation upon the inner Light and Sound of God.

Sant Mat is a vegetarian Path for mystical, spiritual, ethical and theological reasons. The Masters teach that foods are of three kinds: Satvik, Rajsik, and Tamsik. This last category of

foods, which includes all flesh foods, is to be completely avoided. Satvik (pure foods), the first category, includes: grains, beans, vegetables, fruits, seeds, and nuts. Satvik foods are considered by Mystics to promote relaxation, meditation, and spiritual experience.

The bad karma and other negative effects of flesh-eating darkens one's vision of inner Light, weighs the soul down, interfering with concentration and meditation. It's interesting to notice that the Satvik diet of Sant Mat, of Hinduism and the Yoga Philosophy of India is also: the life-extension diet, the anti-cancer diet, the eco-friendly diet, the diet for antioxidants and the other plant-based nutrients, AND the diet of the Light & Sound mystics, East and West, ancient and contemporary.

“I fully endorse veganism as the most humane and compassionate diet that enhances our spiritual life. It is also the best diet for caring for the environment.” (Dr. Jagessar Das, President of the Kabir Association)

*"All living creatures seek a life of peace,
So pass your days on this Earth humanely.
Even the heart that beats in an animal's breast
Knows sympathy, brims with love.*

*So look on all living creatures with loving
compassion – bring to humanity's night the
light of dawn."*

(Sant Darshan Singh)

**For More on the Veganism of the Jesus
Movement and Related Sects of Antiquity,
See the Very Fine Research of Keith Akers -
Website:**

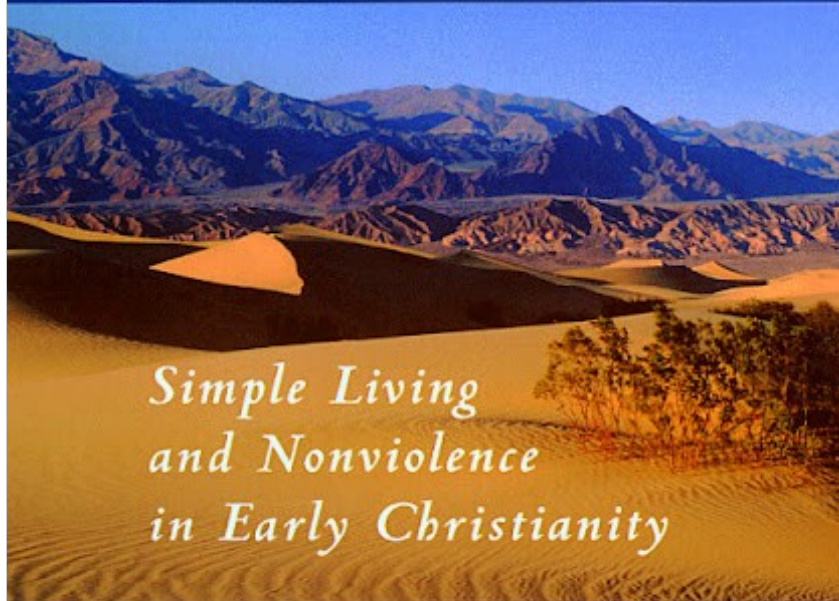
<https://www.compassionatespirit.com>

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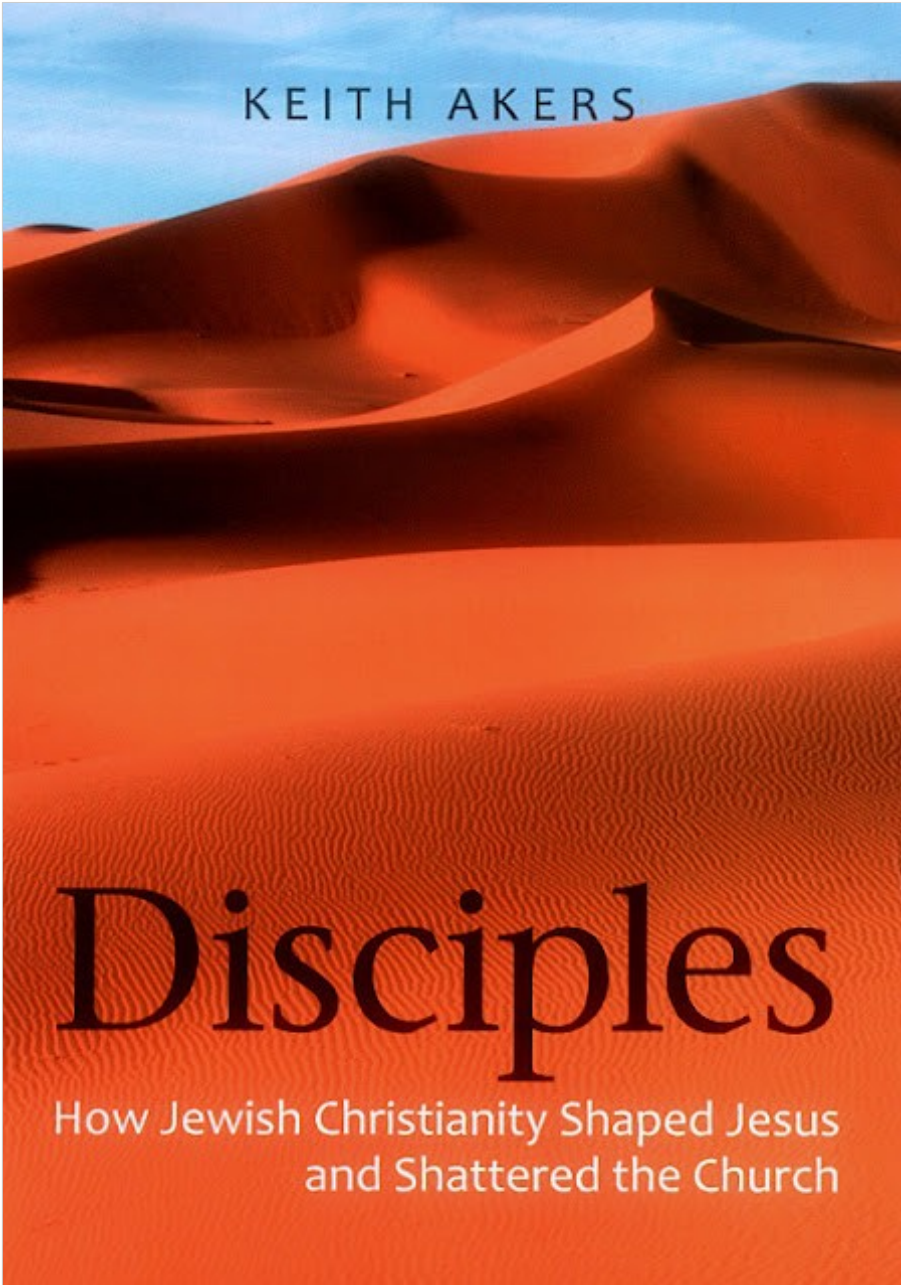
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KEITH AKERS

Disciples

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